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LITTLE TOOKTOO

The helpers look up each child's record and send a report to Santa Claus

LITTLE TOOKTOO

The Story of Santa Claus' Youngest Reindeer

By

MARIE AHNIGHITO PEARY

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Illustrated by Kurt Wiese

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TO MY MOTHER

Whose gallant spirit, unfaltering
courage and constant love have
inspired me since childhood

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LITTLE TOOKTOO

Little Tooktoo was a baby reindeer or caribou, as they are sometimes called, and his name means "reindeer" in the language of the Eskimos in whose country he had always lived. He was not really a baby any more, but we call him that, just to show that he was not quite grown up.

He was feeling very happy one afternoon, as he lifted his head from the moss and willow leaves that he was eating for his supper. All around him on every side stretched rolling hills. Far away against the sky rose the snow-covered heads of mountains where he had never been but which he had seen in the distance all his life. Over the hills and across the plains, as far as his eyes could reach, were hundreds of his brothers and sisters and cousins, relations and friends of all kinds. They

formed a herd of reindeer so enormous that, as one looked, the hills seemed to move in a gentle, blurred sort of way. As a matter of fact, it was the reindeer themselves that were moving about, slowly cropping the grass.

Tooktoo had been born in June and all summer he had frisked about, learning the things that every well-brought-up little caribou should know. At first, he was a bit wobbly on his funny long thin legs and never went very far away from Mother Reindeer. It would have taken only a tiny shove from a clumsy cousin or a big uncle to have upset the little fellow and frightened him badly. Then too, he had not yet learned to pick moss and willow leaves with his long soft lips. Even if he had known how, his baby teeth were hardly strong enough to chew such tough food. And so he stayed by his mother, who always had a drink of warm milk ready for him whenever he was thirsty or hungry.

Gradually, however, he grew larger and was able to

run about without fear of stumbling and falling. One day, Daddy Reindeer gave him his first lesson in finding the proper food for a young reindeer that wishes to become strong and swift. After that, he practiced and practiced, chewing away while watching Mother Reindeer out of the corner of his eye, to make sure that he was doing it correctly. In a little while, he could pick a bit of moss from between two sharp rocks or dig juicy willow shoots out of the ground with his little hooves, as well as any of his bigger brothers.

Now he had grown so large and so independent, that often he did not see Mother or Daddy all day long, from the time he left them in the morning, until he came running back in the evening to curl up at Mother Reindeer's side and fall asleep almost before she knew that he was there.

There were so many new and wonderful things to do! It kept him busy every minute. There were fascinating little brooks, where the water, icy cold from the snowy mountains, came laughing and tumbling along over moss-covered stones. It rippled around his legs as he stood, taking long deep drinks. He often waded up the stream a little distance, just for the fun of exploring.

There was the exciting game of pretending that a hunter was after him, and he must be very, very careful not to make a sound. He would walk quietly along, not stepping on a twig that might snap or a pebble that might rattle, his ears pricked up to catch the least little noise and his nostrils spread wide for any scent that might mean that an enemy was hiding near by. All this was great sport for the little fellow. But once he played his game so well that, as he stole softly around the corner of a big rock, he almost stepped on a young Arctic hare, half asleep in the sunshine. It would be hard to decide which of the two was the more frightened. Poor Tooktoo almost fell over backward when the bunny jumped up, right under his nose, and his heart beat fast for hours afterwards.

But the games he liked best of all, were those he played with the other young reindeer. They had wonderful times chasing one another and pretending to nip each other on the shoulders or ankles. They were all very merry and jolly together.

Summer is an ideal playtime in the Arctic because the sun shines all the time, day and night. Just think, it is never dark. The stars and moon are never seen; just the warm, friendly sun. Even when it is cloudy and his face is hidden, it is broad daylight just the same.

All these things were in Tooktoo's mind as he slowly ate his supper and prepared to go back to Mother Reindeer. They helped to make him very happy but they were not all. Something special had happened that very day, something so wonderful that he had never even dreamed of it. As he thought of it, his eyes brightened, and with an eager and impatient little skip, he raced for home.

The cause of his excitement was this. Ever since he could remember—and he was not very old—his uncle, Prancer, had been visiting the family, resting and getting strong in preparation for the hard work of the winter ahead. Prancer was no less a person than one of the eight specially selected reindeer that form the team of Santa Claus.

You remember them of course,—"Now Dasher! Now Dancer! Now Prancer and Vixen! On, Comet! On, Cupid! On, Dunder and Blitzen!"—Remember? Well, you see, the famous Prancer was little Tooktoo's very own uncle. All summer long, while the family was grazing quietly on the side of some sunny hill, Prancer kept them entertained with stories of Santa Claus and the trips he took each year at Christmas time to bring toys and goodies to children all over the world. For months beforehand, everyone was busy. Presents needed to be finished, tied up and addressed. Santa, in his gorgeous red and gold sleigh drawn by his faithful reindeer, had to make numbers of trips to collect the letters written to him by his little friends. He also had to hear from mothers and fathers whether the children had been good since last Christmas and if they had taken care of the presents brought to them the year before. So you can easily understand that the months of October and November and December were very busy indeed for all those in Santa's little home far in the north. Every one worked as hard as he could in order that things should be ready for the last big trip on Christmas Eve.

But after the holidays were over and everybody had slept and recovered from the excitement, Santa Claus sent his helpers back to their homes. Here they could rest and play and be with their families until he should need them once more.

Santa Claus himself started right in again at his workshop. A year was hardly time enough to make all the kiddie cars and sleds and skates and doll houses and balls and bicycles that would be needed by the time next Christmas came again. So he did not stop to rest or play but commenced working away for dear life. But you must not feel sorry for him or think he was unhappy, because he was not. He had discovered a secret that I will tell you if you would like to hear it. He knows that the harder you try to make someone else happy, the happier you become yourself. So the little shop rang with his singing and whistling as he hammered and sawed and painted.

All these things Prancer had told his little nephew during the long summer days. Now the sun disappeared a little while each night, the days were growing

shorter and the air was cooler. These were all sure signs that summer was over and winter on its way. To-morrow was the day when Prancer was to start on his long journey back to Santa Claus and begin once more the work he loved.

This was the reason for Tooktoo's excitement. Perhaps you are asking why he should be so pleased and happy at having his favorite uncle leave him to be gone for months. You will think that the little fellow would be lonely all through the cold dark winter without the jolly friend who could tell him so many wonderful and interesting things. Ah! but that is because you did not hear the long talks between Prancer and Mother and Daddy Reindeer. You did not know that it was finally decided to allow Tooktoo to return with his uncle and spend Christmas with Santa Claus.

Now are you surprised that he was so happy and excited that he could scarcely breathe and that he scampered for home so fast that his little heels kicked up great lumps of earth and moss behind him?

Very early next morning, when everything was still cold and gray, the two travelers set out on their long journey. At the very last minute it seemed to little Tooktoo that he could not bear to go away so far and leave Mother Reindeer for so long a time. Always,

After the holidays were over, Santa Claus sent his helpers back to their homes

until now, he had been able to find her somewhere in the grazing herd, and have her comfort him if he were hurt or be happy with him over some new pleasure. Now it would be months before he saw her kind brown eyes again or felt her soft warm fur against his side as he dropped asleep at night. But Uncle Prancer was particularly jolly and amusing that morning as they trotted across the barren prairies. Soon the little reindeer forgot the lump in his throat and the ache in his heart, and was looking about him at the strange and interesting country.

As they reached the top of each new hill, Tooktoo saw something fresh to catch his attention. He had never realized before that the world was so large. Prancer had traveled the same road so many times that he knew every step of the way by heart, but he good-naturedly explained everything to his nephew as they went along. As a matter of fact, Prancer was very much pleased to have the sunny-tempered, happy little chap with him. He was the best of traveling companions, never com-

plaining, never saying that he was tired or hungry or homesick, and always full of eager interest in everything about him.

For days, they went towards the north, but stopped now and then, to curl up in the shelter of some great rock to rest and gather strength for the next day's journey. Their meals they snatched as they sped along—some dry grass here, a mouthful of moss there, and willow shoots somewhere else.

It was an entirely new life for Tooktoo as you can imagine. At first he became so tired that his poor little legs just ached. But he never told Prancer. He was so proud to think he had been invited to go on such a wonderful trip that he was afraid to spoil it by acting like a baby. In a few days his muscles grew harder and firmer, and soon he was scarcely tired at all when night came. He wanted to go on still further so that they would reach the home of Santa Claus sooner.

It was growing colder and darker all the time now. The long Arctic night was shutting in on them. As it was the first winter Tooktoo had ever spent, he was just as surprised as you would have been, to find it dark all day as well as all night with only the stars and, occasionally, the moon to give light. He thought his kind old friend, the sun, had forgotten all about him. But

Prancer explained that this happened every year and that in the spring the sun would return again and be with him for another pleasant Arctic summer. It was very cold too, and the wind howled nearly all the time, but neither of the reindeer felt it at all. Not only were their coats of the softest, warmest, heaviest hair, but underneath this, they were each covered with a blanket of thick white fat. So when Tooktoo awoke one morning to find that it had snowed all night, and that he and Prancer were completely covered by a huge snowdrift, all but their black noses and spreading horns, he thought it a great joke and did not even shiver.

But all at once, an awful thought came to him. With the ground covered with snow, how were they to find anything to eat? Already he was as hungry as he could be, and the more he thought of the possibility of having to go without his breakfast, the hungrier he became. Another thing occurred to him. With his tiny hoofs and slender legs, wouldn't he sink down in the soft drifts and not be able to continue his journey? As these thoughts flashed through his mind, the snow did not seem as much of a joke to him as when he first woke up.

But he had forgotten what a wise and experienced traveler Prancer was. When Tooktoo told his uncle how worried he was, Prancer just laughed and said "Why, that is nothing! We shall have no trouble at all!" And so it proved.

Tooktoo had noticed that, as the winter came, the shape of his hoofs had changed a little. But he thought it was either because he was growing up or because of the great amount of walking he was doing. But now he saw the reason very clearly. The small, triangular lump of "frog" as it is called, at the back of each hoof, had been large and spongy all summer, allowing him to cling to the sides of the hills or walk silently over the dead grass. Now, however, it had curved up out of the way and the edges of his hoofs had become very sharp. This, he soon found, was to keep him from slipping on the ice and to help him to dig through the crusted snow for moss on which to feed.

He did not often have to dig, however. Prancer pointed out to him the fact that the sharp and biting wind, which is man's greatest enemy in the north, is the friend and helper of the reindeer. It blows the snow from great patches of ground and the reindeer can find plenty to eat without having to dig for it, except in the heaviest snows of winter.

When they finally started on their trip that day, Tooktoo was surprised to find how easily he could trot along through the snow. His hoofs had a deep division or cleft in them so that they spread as he put his weight on them. He did not find it hard to get along at all and was not any more tired than he had been the day before.

The storm in the night had made the country all about them look like fairyland. Tooktoo thought it was the most beautiful sight he had ever beheld. It had grown cold with the snowfall, and as he and Prancer journeyed on in their swinging trot, the breath came from their nostrils like little puffs of steam and they kicked up a tiny snowstorm behind them with each stroke of their hoofs.

Towards evening, Prancer said: "Well, it looks as if we would have company in camp this evening. It will be a nice change after our lonely trip." Tooktoo glanced about him. He could not see anything that looked like company to him. The only thing at all unusual was a white cloud or streak of fog beyond the small hill they were climbing. But when they topped the hill, he had the surprise of his life. In the sheltered valley below them was a herd of several hundred caribou, gathered together for warmth and companionship.

The cloud Tooktoo had seen was the steam from their nostrils mounting up through the still, frosty air.

It was nice to be with a herd again. Tooktoo very much enjoyed wandering about among the reindeer, quietly munching his supper and listening to all the questions they were asking Prancer. When the young chaps heard how far Tooktoo had come and what a splendid traveler he was, they gathered around him in envy and admiration to hear his own story of the trip. The evening passed very pleasantly and it was a tired but happy little caribou that later dropped off to sleep with the warm soft bodies of the others curled up near

him, just as he had been used to sleeping before he left home.

Next morning, Tooktoo and Prancer said "good-by" to their new friends and began the last part of their journey. Still heading towards the north, their swinging,

tireless trot soon brought them to the shore of the great Arctic ocean. It was completely frozen over at this time of the year. To Tooktoo's astonishment Prancer kept straight ahead, picking his way carefully but firmly down over the rough ice foot, where the force of the wind and water had pushed big sheets of ice against the shore and smashed them into fragments.

Now the really exciting part of their trip began. They were so close to the home of Santa Claus that they were planning to reach it that very evening. Prancer warned his nephew that they must go faster now than ever before. Out on the sea ice there was nothing that a reindeer could eat. If a storm should come up and make them lose their way, they would surely starve to death. So they doubled their speed and almost flew along the ice.

Tooktoo simply could not understand how Prancer could find his way. There was no land in sight except the land they were fast leaving behind them, and Prancer never even turned his head for a farewell glance at that. There was no path across the ice. The ice of the polar sea is always moving, changing and shifting about, wide cracks of water showing in it at times, only to be frozen up in a day or two. No path would ever stay in the same place long enough to be of any use.

Once in a while, as they passed around the black patches of water, Tooktoo saw the round head of a seal bobbing up and down. Prancer explained that the seals could catch fish to eat; the polar bears could eat the seals; and even the walrus, with his curved ivory tusks, could dig sea moss and clams and mussels from the bottom of the ocean, to eat for his dinner. It was only the caribou that could find no food out there among all that ice and water. And at this thought they both stopped talking and rushed ahead even faster than before.

Tooktoo had no way of knowing how long they had been racing ahead at top speed. As it was dark all the time, he could not tell whether it was still morning, or afternoon or evening. Besides, he had all he could do to keep going and to try not to mind the hungry feeling in his stomach and the ache in his legs. At last he felt that it would be impossible for him to continue much

longer. He almost cried, he was so ashamed to ask Prancer to stop and let him rest. But after all, he was only a little chap on his first long trip and that day's journey would have been hard work for even a full-grown caribou. But fortunately, just as he was about to ask for a few minutes rest, Prancer turned his head and said, "Cheer up, young fellow, we are almost there. No need to hurry any more. The ice foot is just ahead. Then it will be just a few minutes before we have a warm supper, a soft bed, and best of all, a hearty welcome from Santa himself. You certainly are a strong and brave little reindeer! Your father is going to be mighty proud of you when I tell him about this trip."

And then wasn't Tooktoo glad he had not complained! After such praise from his uncle he felt he could have run another hundred miles without minding it in the least. Sure enough, while he was thinking this, the ice foot rose directly in front of them. After a short climb they were once more on land. The treacherous sea ice was left behind them and all danger of starvation was at an end.

After several weeks spent in darkness, except for the pale moon and twinkling stars, Tooktoo was almost dazzled by a light shining from a window a short distance away. At first he could scarcely see anything else. But

as his eyes grew accustomed to the glare, he made out the shape of a large, low rambling house. It bristled with chimneys and was surrounded by numbers of smaller buildings. Before he could ask any questions, however, a great double door swung open and he heard a jolly voice. "Well, well, Prancer! Welcome back again to my family! And this, I suppose, is the little nephew? He must be pretty hungry and tired after being so long on the way. It is a stiff trip for such a young fellow. Come in, come in!" And there they were in a warm, brightly lighted barn and Santa Claus himself was closing the doors behind them.

Now Tooktoo, being a reindeer and not a little boy, of course had never had any picture books. He had never seen any pictures of Santa Claus and had no idea how he looked. But he recognized the old gentleman at once because he was so jolly, so kind and so thought-

ful. Santa left them almost at once and Tooktoo had a chance to look around him.

The barn was large and warm and bright. The floor was covered deep in hay which filled the entire place with its delightful fragrance. After the dark and cold outside it was like stepping into another world.

Prancer said that this was where the reindeer team slept and Santa had tried to make it as homelike as possible for them. For this reason there were no stalls such as we have for our cows and horses. Santa knew that reindeer like to sleep near each other, not separated by wooden partitions. Through the center of the barn ran a little stream. It was so much like the streams at home that Tooktoo could not believe that it had not always been there and the barn just built around it. But it was another way that Santa had of showing his thoughtfulness for his faithful friends.

Just at this moment, the door opened. In came the old gentleman himself, his arms full of delicious moss for their supper and in his pockets, oats, apples and lumps of sugar for dessert. Tooktoo had never tasted anything so good before and you may be sure he enjoyed his meal!

Close behind Santa came Prancer's seven team-mates who had just heard of the arrival of their friend. Then

The barn was large and warm and bright

began such a racket as you never heard before. These eight chums had not seen each other for months and they had to talk over everything that had happened while they were separated.

Tooktoo was very much interested, of course, but try as he would, he simply could not keep his eyes open and finally he fell fast asleep and knew nothing more until next morning.

When Tooktoo finally awakened, the other reindeer were already stirring. With a bright "Good morning" to his new friends, he trotted to the stream in the middle of the barn to dip his muzzle in the cool waters and really wake himself up. It gave him a deliciously lazy feeling to know that he was to remain in this pleasant

place for a long time. For weeks he had known as soon as he opened his eyes after a night's sleep, that a day of hard traveling was ahead of him. Now all that was changed.

By the time he had finished his toilet and eaten a breakfast of moss, all the reindeer had gone but Cupid, the youngest of the team. Cupid explained that, in this busy house, everyone had his duties to perform and did them cheerfully and promptly. They knew that the happiness of hundreds of little girls and boys depended on them. Santa Claus had excused Cupid for the day, in order that he might show Tooktoo around the place and instruct him in his new tasks. There were no idle creatures in Santa's big establishment and Tooktoo was expected to do his part with the rest.

Tooktoo liked Cupid immensely. He was a jolly fellow, not much older than Tooktoo himself, and was very proud of the honor of being one of Santa Claus' team. He was eager to show him how much must be done each year in order that everyone may have a "Merry Christmas" and so they set off at once.

Tooktoo had noticed the night before that there were a great many small buildings grouped around the large one. He soon discovered why. Each small building was a workshop devoted to a special kind of work and the reindeer were kept busy carrying unfinished toys, paint, lumber and packages of all kinds, from one shop to another.

From the barn they passed down a long, narrow, well-lighted passage. At the end a door opened into an enormous room, so bright and so noisy that it almost frightened Tooktoo at first. This, Cupid explained, was the postoffice. It was unusually busy at present, because four reindeer had just brought in some mail and the letters and packages were being sorted.

As they left the post office Cupid paused in a small entryway. There were hooks along the walls and on each hook a name. All the hooks were empty except two which bore the names "Cupid" and "Tooktoo." On each of these hooks hung two little flashlights, one red

and one white, and each fitted with a strap. With a sweep of his horns Cupid reached down a pair to Tooktoo and showed him how to fasten them on, the white one on his forehead and the red one right over his funny, stubby tail.

"It is so light in here you have forgotten that it is dark outside," explained Cupid. "We always wear them when we go out, by order of Santa Claus. You see, everyone is in such a hurry that, without these warning lights, we might run into each other in the dark and perhaps hurt each other badly. Santa cannot risk having a member of his team laid up so near Christmas. Besides," and here Cupid gave a shudder and glanced quickly over his shoulder, "you know, there are wolves. They are always hanging around, watching for a reindeer that may have strayed too far from the house. They won't come near us while we wear the lights, for they are terribly afraid of fire. Be sure you never go out without strapping on your 'flashies'!"

Tooktoo was very much sobered by Cupid's warning. Everything had seemed warm and safe after his journey. It was hard to realize that there was any danger near. But he promised Cupid that he would be careful and they set out.

There were so many shops and so much going on in all of them that Tooktoo became very tired, especially his poor little head. He had been accustomed, all through his short life, to being out of doors where it was quiet and peaceful; no hurry scurry, no dashing from place to place, just the friendly starlight and in summer, the constant sunshine. The only hurried movements he had seen were those of the occasional Arctic hare which he had frightened in his grazing. Then too, going in and out of the shops from soft velvety darkness and cold into bright light and warmth, confused him. It was all different from anything he had ever known before.

The last place they were to visit was the library. It took them almost ten minutes of trotting over the hard packed snow before they reached it. Cupid said it was put far from the other buildings in order that the library workers should not be disturbed by noises from the shops.

"You see," Cupid said, "this is really the most important place in all of Santa's establishment. It is here that

letters come from children all over the world, telling Santa Claus what they would like to have for Christmas. The books around the walls contain the records of these children; whether they are good or naughty; what they received last Christmas; what kind of care they take of their toys; if they always ask for things for themselves or if they think of others—all this is to be found in some one of the books. The helpers look up each child's record and send a report to Santa Claus with the letter. After reading both letter and report Santa decides what the child is to receive at Christmas. Only the reindeer whom Santa is sure he can trust are allowed to carry letters back and forth to the library. I am one of the library reindeer," said Cupid, proudly, "and the name of the other one, if you please, is Tooktoo."

Tooktoo was so surprised and happy that he could have turned a somersault for joy. But his antlers had grown so much during the trip that he was afraid of breaking them, so he ran around in circles instead until Cupid cried "Stop. You are making me dizzy." But Tooktoo had to do something to show his joy or he would have burst.

He had known all the time, of course, that Santa Claus would put him to work. But he had not expected to be given such an important job as this one. All day he had been afraid that he would be given a task indoors and he was afraid that the brightness and warmth would put him to sleep and then Santa Claus would think him lazy.

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He made up his mind, then and there, that he would never make Santa sorry he had trusted him. Cupid was amused at Tooktoo's solemn expression but it pleased him, too, because he knew that Santa Claus had gained one more faithful helper.

In the north there are only two meals a day, breakfast and dinner. The tour they had made had lasted so long that now the day's work was over and everyone was stopping for the night. Cupid and Tooktoo turned on their flashlights and started back to the barn.

When they stepped outside they were surprised to see

that the dense blackness of the Arctic night had given place to a queer blue-ish gray color. In the northern sky long, fan-shaped fingers of light were darting back and forth. As they watched, the lights changed colors. Sometimes they were yellow, sometimes orange or red, and sometimes a deep purple blue. In time with their movements across the sky, the lights made a strange sound, like the rustling of a stiff piece of silk.

Tooktoo knew that this was the Aurora Borealis—the Northern Lights. He had heard Prancer tell about them but he had not realized that they would be so bright. In fact, few have ever seen the Northern Lights as brilliant as Tooktoo saw them that evening, for they are at their brighest in the extreme north, where no one lives. Cupid told Tooktoo that he had once heard a fairy story that said that at the North Pole was buried an enormous pot of gold and jewels. It was the reflection of the wonderful colors of the jewels which caused the Northern Lights!

At the barn, dinner was awaiting them and the evening passed very pleasantly. All the reindeer congratulated Tooktoo on his new job and wished him good luck. Prancer especially was very proud of the good impression his nephew had made on Santa Claus.

Tooktoo knew that this was the Aurora Borealis—the Northern Lights

The next few days went by like the wind. Tooktoo attended strictly to his job, being sure that not one of the precious letters or slips was lost or mislaid. He made his trips back and forth so rapidly that several times Santa rewarded him with a smile or a pat on the head. He and Cupid did not travel together, as he had hoped. Cupid was always returning from the library while Tooktoo was going towards it. And as Tooktoo went back to the postoffice, he would meet Cupid on his way to the library. He could always see Cupid's flashlight twinkling merrily in the distance long before they met. It kept him from feeling lonely.

But busy as his days were, and tired as he was when his work was over, the best time of all for Tooktoo was in the evening after supper when the reindeer team lay about on their beds of moss and chatted together. Sometimes it was of their daily tasks that they spoke but when they told of trips they had made with Santa Claus on other Christmases, Tooktoo sat up in his eagerness to hear more and his nostrils quivered with excitement. All the things about which they talked were new and strange to Tooktoo. He had never even seen a house until he saw that of Santa Claus.

And the children for whom all these lovely things were planned, what were they like? How Tooktoo

longed to see them for himself, but as he could not do that, the next best thing was to hear about them.

After listening to the conversation for several evenings, Tooktoo finally screwed up enough courage to ask a question that had been troubling him for some time. It had taken Prancer and him several weeks to reach the North Pole from their home in Alaska. How then could Santa Claus go all over the world in a single night and deliver presents to all the children who were expecting him?

The older reindeer looked amused but interested when he put this question to them. "I was wondering how

you would figure that out, youngster," said Dunder. "It's this way. By ourselves, we are only reindeer. But Santa Claus is the spirit of Christmas, which means that he is a sort of fairy, and when we are working for him, we can do things that would be impossible otherwise. Only once a year do we travel at such a pace as we do on Christmas Eve but it is a wonderful experience and one we never forget."

How Tooktoo longed to try it! His eyes sparkled at the thought. But Dasher had begun to tell one of his famous stories and Tooktoo was all attention. He never liked to miss a word of these evening chats.

"Do you remember" (Tooktoo's favorite stories began—"Do you remember"), said Dasher, "the time we had a last-minute call for help right up here in the Arctic?"

"In the Arctic?" asked Tooktoo, all excitement. "For an Eskimo child?"

"Well, you might call her that," said Dasher with a chuckle. "But I don't think she would like it. She was born up here in Greenland although her parents are from the United States."

"Would Santa have gone to her if she had been an Eskimo?" Tooktoo wanted to know.

"Why, of course, some of his best children are among

the Eskimos and besides, Santa never refuses to go to anyone if they deserve it and he can possibly get there. But this was a little different. This little girl was supposed to be safely in her home in Washington and as her family always celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve—"

"On Christmas Eve!" exclaimed Tooktoo. "Don't all the people have it at the same time?"

"Certainly not! If they did, how do you suppose Santa Claus would ever get around to them all? If you interrupt me all the time, I'll never be able to finish my story."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, do go on," said Tooktoo, very much ashamed.

"Well," resumed Dasher, "her things had already been taken to Washington and we were just getting back from our last trip when Santa found a message awaiting him. It seemed that the little girl and her mother had come north in the summer time when the Arctic is at its loveliest. The little girl's father was an explorer. An explorer"—he went on hastily, for Tooktoo was on the very point of interrupting again—"is a man who devotes years of his life, that he might be spending happily at home with his family, to finding out about strange lands and places where no one else has ever been.

"This particular explorer, the father of the little girl who caused all the excitement, had been away from home for nearly three years, and naturally his family was more than anxious to see him again. So the little girl and her mother, who was a very brave woman, set out in a big black ship, to pay him a visit and to bring him extra food and clothing. The sun was shining day and night when they first arrived here and the ice was not all over the sea as it is now. There was enough water to allow the ship to come further and further north, always seeking the explorer and never finding him. Then suddenly, before they realized it, winter was upon them; a great iceberg blocked the entrance of their little harbor and there they were, prisoners for the long Arctic night.

"This was not so serious as it sounds for they had

plenty of food and warm clothing. With the exception of two things, they could have been quite happy. But they had not found the little girl's father, and they had no idea what to do about Christmas. All this was told to Santa Claus in the note he found awaiting him when he returned from his last trip that night.

"The little girl's mother had written—'I hate to trouble you at this late hour but I have thought and thought what to do and I know if anyone can help me, you can.'—But it was quite a problem even for Santa Claus. You see, the things he had intended for the little girl had all been taken to Washington, the other toys were gone and the workshops were empty."

"Mercy, I hope he did something!" exclaimed Tooktoo, quite forgetting he had promised not to interrupt.

"Oh, yes, he did something all right; you can always trust Santa Claus. He rummaged around until he found some books and a few sheets of paper dolls and odds and ends of candy—enough to fill a good-sized box. But his best find was a lovely big doll that hadn't been finished in time. But all it needed was a wig and Santa sat down himself and made one for her in less time than it takes to tell about it!

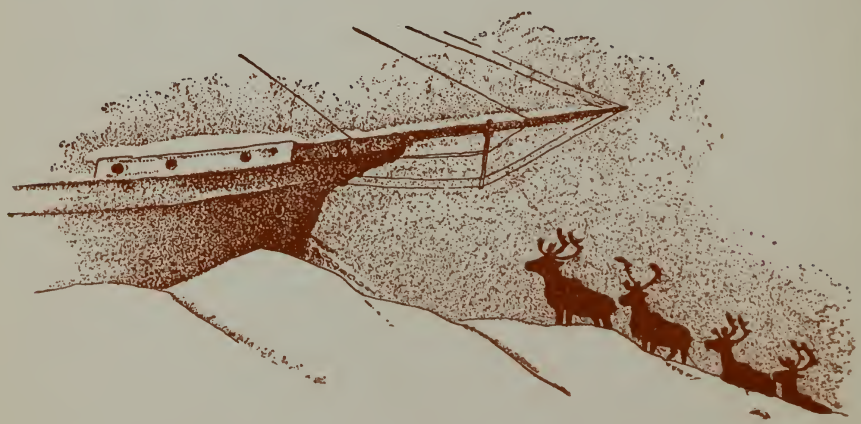
"And then we were off. We didn't have far to go but we went past the place before we realized it. The ship

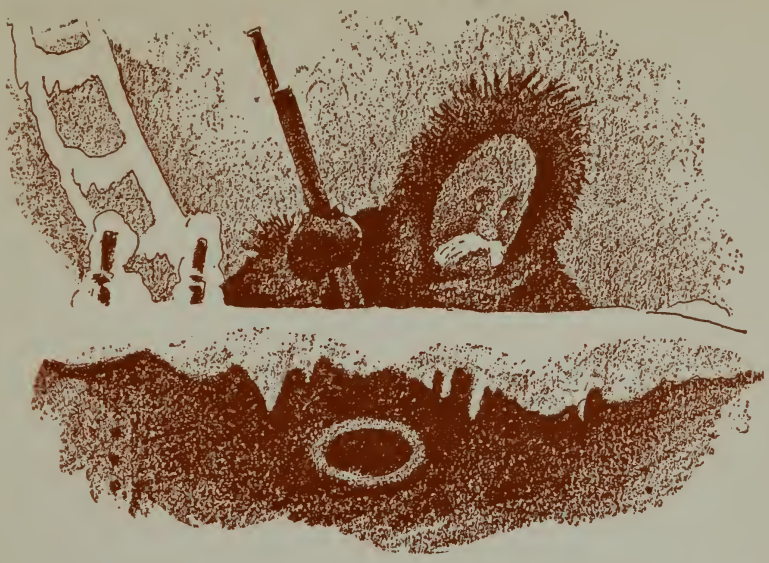
was all banked in with snow blocks to keep the people inside as warm as possible and all that showed above the ice were the slender masts. And we had a terrible time landing." Here all the reindeer began to laugh in thinking of the difficulty they had had.

"You see," Dasher went on, kindly explaining to Tooktoo, "there were a lot of Eskimos living near the ship and they all kept dogs. Now an Eskimo dog is as savage as a wolf and just as hungry and we didn't want any mix-up with them. We were so busy avoiding the dogs and trying to pick out a good spot in which to come

down that we all forgot about the people on the ship.

"We circled about a while and finally found a smooth spot just under the ship's bow. We must have made some slight noise in landing for several sailors came up on deck, and the next thing we knew a shot went whistling past our heads. This was quite a surprise and we were inclined to be indignant until the explanation occurred to us. The deep shadow of the ship's bow in the moonlight hid the sleigh with Santa in it from the sight of the man on watch and seeing only a herd of reindeer, as he supposed, he naturally called the others and they began shooting at us eagerly. The poor things had had no fresh meat for months. I don't know what we would have done, if the little girl's mother had not come run-





ning out on deck when she heard the noise. 'Stop, boys!' she cried. 'It is Santa Claus!' "

Here Dasher paused for breath but the eager little reindeer could not wait. "Go on, go on," he cried. "What happened then?"

Dasher rose to his feet, pretending to grumble. "Can't I even get a drink without being bothered and hurried?"

But he was just pretending because as soon as he returned from the brook, he smilingly took up his story again.

"There's little more to tell, except that Santa Claus came out perfectly delighted. He said he did like folks who tried to help themselves. He said this brave mother

had everything ready except the presents. She had baked cakes and iced them; she had popped corn and strung it to decorate their little cabin; she had made stockings out of coarse netting and button-holed them with red yarn; she had even managed a Christmas tree!"

This was too much for little Tooktoo. He interrupted again. "A Christmas tree! How could she? Trees don't grow up here, you know they don't, Dasher! I never saw a tree in all my life!"

"Very true, my lad," returned Dasher. "But it is remarkable what mothers can do! This tree was made from an old broomstick, the bark was of wax into which coffee grounds had been pressed while it was still soft, and the needles were of hay, cut in short lengths and

painted green. And Santa said it was trimmed in silver paper and strings of popcorn and looked as lovely as any tree he had ever seen. He said when he saw all she had done, that he wished with all his heart that he could give her the one Christmas present she wanted more than anything else—to have the little girl's father share their Christmas."

"Bedtime!" called a jolly voice from the door, and there stood Santa himself, with his spectacles pushed up on his forehead, and his pen still in his hand. Tooktoo decided that Santa never slept but he himself was very tired. Suddenly it occurred to him that he was going to

be very lonely here after Christmas. Santa and the team would be gone, all the work would be finished and he would have nothing to do but await Prancer's return in order to start for home.

How he wished that he might go along with his friends on Christmas Eve! But he knew this was impossible. An extra reindeer would hold them back on this long journey when every minute counted. So he decided not to think about it any more and curling up, he was soon fast asleep.

The days sped by faster and faster, full of work to be accomplished carefully and well. And if ever Tooktoo

became tired of those endless trips back and forth between the library and the postoffice, there were always the evenings with their stories and friendly talk to which he could look forward.

One evening, Tooktoo asked them to tell him something about other children whose houses they had visited at Christmas.

"Well, let me see," answered Comet. "I remember distinctly when we used to go to the home of little George Washington."

"Who was George Washington?" Tooktoo inquired innocently. Comet gave him a look of astonishment and then turned to Prancer in disgust.

"I must say you haven't done a very good job at educating your young nephew if he doesn't even know who George Washington is!"

"Now, now, don't be too hard on him," answered Prancer good naturedly. "Remember, he is still pretty young. Most of his time until the present has been devoted to learning how to live. George Washington," he went on, turning to Tooktoo, "was one of the greatest men the world has ever known. But he loved Christmas when he was a little boy, just as much as any child would."

"Yes," put in Dunder, "but Christmas was very different then. Most of the fun came in the great feasts they had during the holidays and the big dances. Nearly everyone lived in the country in those days and there were no stores in which to buy things and very little money to spend. Everything the people had was made on their own big farms or plantations. But I think the children had just as much fun as they do now."

"More fun," replied one of the other reindeer. "Most children would rather live in the country than all cooped up in a big city. What fun do city children have in a snowstorm, I would like to know? Out on a farm there is coasting and skating and sleighing and even snowballing, for there are no windows to break."

From this, the different reindeer went on to tell of other experiences—how in Germany all the presents must be there early in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, for that was the day the Germans celebrated and not the twenty-fifth of December; how in Holland the children, instead of hanging up their stockings set out their little wooden shoes in rows, to receive whatever Santa Claus was kind enough to leave for them; how in South America and many countries near the equator, Christmas was

not a time of cold and snow and holly and icicles but was celebrated in the midst of warm sunshine and flowers. All these stories interested Tooktoo so much that he could hardly breathe for fear of missing a word. And how he laughed the night they told of the man who had written a poem about them and so had made them all famous.

For years the team had gone about its business of carrying Santa Claus on his Christmas trips and while everyone knew about the dear old man, and children all over the world loved the very sound of his name, very little was ever said about his faithful reindeer. And then one evening, they had come to a house where the father of the family was a very light sleeper.

At the first sound of their approach, he had awakened

and run to the window to look out. He had seen them arrive; had spoken to Santa Claus as he came down the chimney and then had watched them drive away with Santa cracking his whip and calling on each of the team by name. It was such a lovely sight that the man sat down at once and wrote the poem called "The Night Before Christmas" which everyone knows. The reindeer were quite proud and very much pleased because it made the children know and love Santa's team almost as much as they loved Santa himself.

The days sped by faster and faster until all at once it was the day before Christmas—the very day when the great trip was to be made.

In spite of careful planning, there seemed to be hundreds of things still to be done before everything could be packed in the big red sleigh and Santa Claus be ready to start. Excitement was in the very air as everyone flew back and forth on last-minute errands. Tooktoo had never made his trips between library and postoffice as quickly as he did that day. Yet it seemed as if the work would never be finished. He and Cupid did not even pause long enough to call a greeting to one another as they passed and re-passed. But the two little lights, bobbing merrily in the darkness, flashed a cheering message of their own.

With Santa cracking his whip and calling on each of the team by name

At the big barn all was bustle and confusion. Some of the reindeer were snatching a hasty supper; others were looking over their harness to make sure that it was in perfect condition; the red sleigh was drawn up before the door and all kinds of mysterious bundles were being skillfully packed away in its roomy depths. There was only an hour left before starting time.

All the while that he was making his own preparations for departure Prancer kept watching the door. He

wanted to say a few words of farewell to Tooktoo and he could not imagine what was delaying him. Tooktoo had wanted to be sure to see Santa drive off, perched high in the red and gold sleigh, all bundled in furs and drawn by his eight dashing reindeer. It was the moment he had looked forward to for weeks. Finally Prancer decided to go in search of his young nephew, and so with a few words to the others, he left the barn.

Darker than ever it seemed outside, and bitter cold. Prancer made straight for the postoffice but there he was told that neither Tooktoo nor Cupid had been there for some time.

"That's so!" thought Prancer with a start. "Cupid wasn't at the barn but I never missed him. Now I wonder what those two youngsters are up to!"

He soon found out. Half way between the postoffice and the library he came upon a sad little group. Cupid, his forehead flashlight smashed to bits, was lying in the snow, his eyes closed and his sides shaken by long sobbing breaths. His sled, full of undelivered packages and letters, stood beside him.

And dancing up and down with rage was Tooktoo. He was like a little fury, stamping his tiny hoofs with indignation, while tears of anger and also of pity for his friend, filled his eyes.

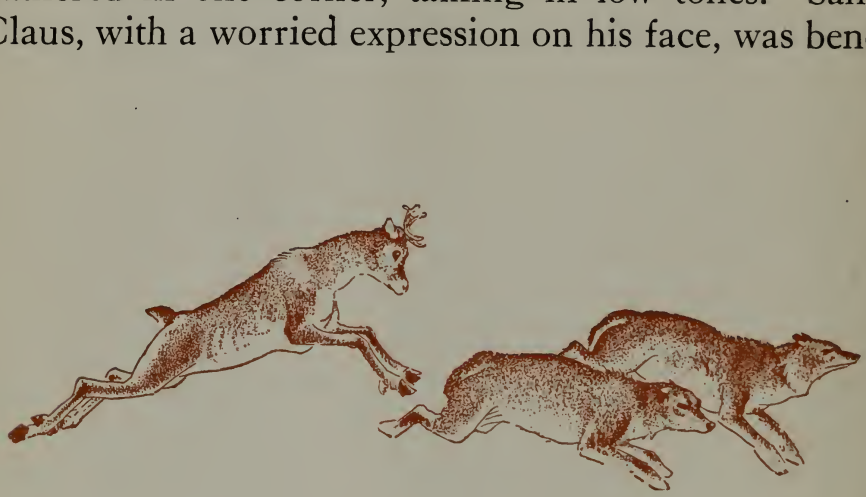
Prancer had the story from him in a few words while they were lifting Cupid onto the empty sled. Cupid had smashed his flashlight on his last trip but had been in such a hurry that he had not stopped to have it fixed, trusting to his swift heels to save him if danger threatened.

He had been attacked by wolves just afterwards and because of the weight of his sled (which it had never occurred to him to desert) he had not been able to get away. Tooktoo had arrived just in time, and although frightened to death himself, he had plunged in without a moment's hesitation, and kicking, butting and using his antlers, had managed to put the wolves to rout.

Prancer told him to take Cupid's sled which he had almost died defending, to the library while he himself would haul Cupid to the barn on Tooktoo's empty sled.

This Tooktoo did at once with a sad heart and then hurried back to see how Cupid was getting along.

But as he entered the barn, the strangest silence greeted him. Seven reindeer, looking very solemn, were gathered in one corner, talking in low tones. Santa Claus, with a worried expression on his face, was bending over Cupid. Tooktoo went over to Cupid and saw at a glance, that although there was no longer any danger of his dying, he was certainly in no condition to make the trip. Tooktoo's heart sank. What would Santa do? And looking at the others he knew they were thinking the same thing.



But when Santa saw Tooktoo his face cleared as if by magic, and he rose from his knees with a smile.

"Brave splendid Tooktoo!" he said. "We are all so proud of you. You have made us all so happy that it seems as if Christmas were here already. Had it not been for you, we would never have seen dear Cupid again. As for the important mail that would have been lost, I can't bear to think of it. But one thing I cannot understand. How could a youngster like you, without any experience, fight off six wolves? Oh, yes," seeing a look of surprise on Tooktoo's face, "I know there were six. Cupid has told me all about it and how you came to his rescue just in the nick of time. But, my child, why didn't you run for help to the Library? You might have been killed, also, trying to do it alone."

"I never thought of it," said Tooktoo, frankly. "My one thought when I saw Cupid fighting so desperately, was to get to him and help. Of course, it would have been better to get help. I am ashamed to have been so stupid."

"My boy," said Santa, laying a friendly hand on Tooktoo's shoulder, "you have done nothing of which to be ashamed. Perhaps if you had gone to the library for help, it would have been too late when you returned. No, Tooktoo, you did the finest thing that anyone could

have done. In your anxiety to help another, you forgot your own fear and your own danger. And so, just to show you how pleased I am with you, I am going to give you your Christmas present now, instead of having you wait until we return." So saying, Santa Claus brought out a box marked "Tooktoo."

How Tooktoo's eyes sparkled! He had never had a Christmas present before and to have it given to him by Santa Claus was better than he had ever dreamed. He tore away the wrappings with teeth and hooves, and what do you suppose he saw? A harness, exactly like the ones the team wore as it drew Santa's sleigh on Christmas Eve. But Tooktoo's harness was made of bright red

leather trimmed all over with tiny golden bells. And on the strap that went across his chest was a gold plate on which was engraved—"TO TOOKTOO FROM SANTA CLAUS. FOR BRAVERY AND DEVOTION."

Tears of happiness stood in Tooktoo's eyes as he tried on the new harness and let the others admire it. Even Cupid raised his head from his moss pillow and smiled with pleasure. Then came the voice of Santa Claus.

"Come, boys, it is time to go. Cupid is well enough for us to leave him to the care of the helpers. We must not forget that the children are expecting us. But I cannot go with only seven reindeer to pull that heavy sled. I thought that perhaps, just for this evening, young

Tooktoo would help us out by taking Cupid's place. Will you, Tooktoo?"

WOULD he? It was the one thing he had wanted more than anything else in the world. Gone was his tired feeling and as the team set out on its Christmas journey, the happiest heart in the Arctic, beat under the crimson harness at Prancer's side. For by his cheerfulness, his attention to duty, his unselfishness and his bravery, Tooktoo had won his greatest desire.

THE END